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ABSTRACT

Elementary school students from kindergarten through eighth grade (N=202) used a Student Perceptions instrument to rate the behaviors of the novice and master teachers with whom they worked routinely. Assessments occurred at the beginning of the school year, in October, and near the end of the school year, in May. A 1989 study using primary grades children as assessors of teaching performance had revealed that students did not differentiate between the performance of novice interns and that of master teachers. This study, using students from primary age to the age of 13, confirmed the results of the previous study. The final results revealed that primary, intermediate, and middle level students consistently rated all of their teachers, master and novice, significantly lower at the end of the year than they had rated them at the beginning of the year. The results were directly opposed to the data obtained from expert and self-assessment studies. While the students discriminated between the competency of interns and master teachers toward the end of the school year, they were also more severe in their judgments of teaching performance toward the end of the year. This report analyses these findings and raises questions for future research. (JD)

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Student Perceptions of Teaching Competencies

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Student Perceptions of Teaching Competencies

Introduction

In the past ten years teacher evaluation has taken on a range of complexions from process rating scales that assess classroom interactions on the one hand, to product assessments that use student achievement scores to evaluate teachers on the other. However, most teacher evaluation approaches have emphasized the assessment of teaching competencies. Performance based evaluation is seen to have certain advantages. For example, when deficiencies in performance are specifically identified, procedures for remediation can be recommended. When the evaluatee has teaching weakness pinpointed, he or she knows what modifications are expected. Consequently, many districts use a performance based approach.

Several states have instituted mandatory teacher performance evaluation procedures using the Teacher Performance Assessment Instruments (TPAI). The TPAI was developed by the Georgia Teacher Assessment Project team which took four years to develop and validate the instrument. The TPAI focuses on teacher competence in the areas of planning instruction and choosing materials to achieve instructional objectives; cognitive interaction with learners and skill in organizing and presenting instruction activities; and interpersonal skills associated with classroom climate and performance during instruction (Tanner & Ebers, 1985).

At Falk School, the laboratory school at the University of Pittsburgh, research projects using the TPAI to gather data in

the assessment of the performance of teaching interns have been conducted over a period of several years. The internship is a graduate program designed for college graduates with degrees in liberal arts, education, or other professional fields. Upon completion of the program, the student earns a Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree and is eligible for an Instructional I teaching certificate in Pennsylvania. The 48 credit program begins with a summer session and continues through a second summer. During the school year, interns have practicum experiences in a school. At Falk School the interns have a 180 day clinical experience under the direction of a master teacher. The research projects in which the TPAI has been used have tracked the acquisition of teaching competencies by interns in the course of their practica.

Objectives and Data Collection

Research results have shown significant improvement in the performance of interns in the course of their teaching experiences. The gains were reported by master teachers (Vollmer, 1982) and by the interns themselves (Vollmer, et al., 1987) when self assessment procedures were employed. However, children's perceptions of competency acquisition were not so positive. Vollmer & Creek (1989) reported that two multi-age classrooms of primary students did not discern any differences in the teaching performance of interns in October, near the beginning of the practicum, and in May, toward the end of the practicum. Furthermore, the primary children did not distinguish between the teaching competence of novice (intern) teachers and

master teachers. These results raised the question as to whether older, more sophisticated students would make such a distinction. At that time, the following study was designed.

Falk School services children from kindergarten through eighth grade. Multi-age classrooms form three instructional levels. The primary level includes grades K-2; the intermediate level grades 3-5; and the middle level grades 6-8. The population in the study was comprised of 44 primary students, 92 intermediate students, and 66 middle level students, for a total of 202. 10 MAT interns and 10 master teachers who had routine contact with the children were assessed by the students on two occasions, at the beginning of the school year in October, and near the end of the school year in May.

The student perceptions instrument used to elicit the children's responses was derived from competencies in the TPAI. A total of 30 statements that described teaching behaviors that represented 9 TPAI competencies were constructed. Students were directed to score each behavior in the following way: score a 5 for always; 3 for sometimes; 1 for never. The score for each competency was the mean score of the statements constructed to measure that competency.

Results

A total of 202 elementary school students used a Student Perceptions instrument to rate the behaviors of the novice and master teachers with whom they worked routinely. The instrument included 30 items that could be scored from 1 to 5, consequently, mean scores could range form 30 to 150. The October testing

produced mean scores of 119.4 for the novice teachers and 120.9 for the master teachers. The difference of 1.5 was not significant, suggesting that the students did not discriminate between the instruction provided by novices and master teachers at the beginning of the school year. On only one of the nine competencies measured, the master teachers were perceived to be superior. Students rated the master teachers higher on the competency, "reinforces and encourages learner involvement in instruction" (Fig. 3).

When the assessments were repeated in May, the results were quite different. The mean score for the novice teachers was 106.3, a statistically significant drop of 13.2 points from the October assessment. The May score for the master teachers also dropped significantly, from 120.9 to 114.6, a loss of 6.3. Furthermore, the same students who did not discriminate between the performances of novices and master teachers in October, rated the master teachers 8.3 points higher in May, a statistically significant difference. The students also rated the master teachers higher on 6 of the 9 TPAI competencies measured in the May assessments. Master teachers were ranked higher on competencies 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 (Appendix A) in the second evaluation.

The results were consistent across age levels. Primary children (6 and 7 years olds), intermediate children (8, 9 and 10 year olds), and middle level students (11, 12 and 13 year olds) produced data that reflected the results for the total population (Table I).

Summary and Discussion

The faculty of the campus laboratory school at the University of Pittsburgh has been using the Teacher Performance Assessment Instruments (TPAI) to gather data about the competency acquisition of novice teachers over a period of years. This series of studies on the competency acquisition of teacher trainees had consistently produced evidence that the trainees improve the quality of their performance between the months of October and May (Vollmer, et al. 1988, 1987, 1986; Creek and Vollmer, 1986, 1984). Master teachers perceived this growth. When self assessment (a promising practice in the assessment of teaching performance) was employed, the perceptions of the trainees agreed with those of the master teachers. The first group of assessors that did not see growth was the population of primary children used in 1989 (Vollmer and Creek). This group of 6 and 7 years olds did not see any differences in the teaching performances of novices and master teachers. Furthermore, they perceived no growth in competence from October to May. In short, they did not identify differences in performance on any of the criteria used in the research. When the writers presented these results at AATCE/NALS in New Orleans, several questions were generated. Where the children too young to perceive the differences in teaching performance that was evident to more mature observers? Would older students, who had been in school longer, produce different results? Should we conclude that the judgments of naive observers cannot provide accurate information?

This project was an attempt to address these questions. And the results are interesting. The October assessments produced results that appeared to confirm the results of the 1989 study using primary children as assessors of teaching performance. The students did not differentiate between the performance of novice interns and master teachers. Moreover, the lack of differentiation was consistent throughout the population used in the study. Intermediate students (8, 9 and 10 year olds) and middle level students (11, 12, and 13 year olds) mirrored the perceptions of the primary children. These rather bland results were leading the researchers toward the idea that an elementary student body might not be a reliable source of information for the judgement of teaching performance. But the post-test results disabused us of any such notion.

The post-test results (Table 1) were virtually the same for each of the three age levels. Pupils consistently rated all of their teachers, master teachers and novices, significantly lower than they had rated them at the beginning of the year in October! These results are directly opposed to the data obtained from expert and self-assessment studies. Why do the children, at every age level, perceive a decline in teacher competence? Furthermore, the students perceived significant differences in the performances of novices and master teachers.

In October, master teachers were rated superior to novices on one of nine competencies. In May, the children rated the master teachers superior to the novices on <u>six</u> of nine competencies. An analysis of the assessment of the competencies

on which the teachers were rated (Appendix A) is interesting. For example, the master teachers were perceived to be superior in using instructional techniques, methods, and media; organizing time, space, materials and equipment; and managing classroom interactions; all competencies that are enhanced by experience. Interestingly, the children indicated that they thought that the master teachers demonstrated a wider repertoire of teaching methods. This finding is consistent with the findings of Fogarty, et al. (1983). The Fogarty study reported that novices failed to implement as large a variety of instructional actions in response to student performance cues, to consider prior knowledge about subject matter, and to consider pedagogical principles during ongoing instruction. On the other hand, the responses of master teachers were found to be more complex with regard to specific categories on instructional actions.

The substantive findings of the research are that the perceptions of the population of children used in this study differ from the perceptions of master teachers and the self-perceptions of interns reported in earlier studies. Also, the students discriminate between the competency of interns and master teachers toward the end of the school year, but not at the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, the students are more severe in their judgement of teaching performance toward the end of the school year than they are at the beginning of the year. Finally, the student perceptions were not a function of chronological age. Older, more experienced students provided essentially the same data as younger children.

These findings generate a number of interesting questions:

1. Why do the perceptions of children differ so dramatically form the judgments of expert assessors?

2. Why do the children rate interns to have less competence toward the end of their practicum than they did at the beginning of the practicum?

3. Are student perceptions a reliable source of information in the assessment of teaching competence?

Such questions provide subject matter for professional discussions and topics for future study. Recommendations for further research include verification of children's reports, analyses of the reasoning that subjects employ to support their judgments, and the assessment of the perceptions of new populations in the evaluation of teaching competencies.

TABLE 1. TOTAL MEAN SCORES BY STUDENT GRADE LEVEL.

TEST	PRIMARY n = 44		INTERMEDIATE n = 92		MIDDLE n = 66	
	MASTER	INTERN	MASTER	INTERN	MASTER	INTERN
OCTOBER[1] PRE-TEST	128	125	120	120	119	114
MAY POST-TEST	115 *	107	116 *	107	111 *	104

[1] LEVELS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT, $p < .002$ ANOVA.

* MASTER SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM INTERN, $p < .003$.

Figure 1

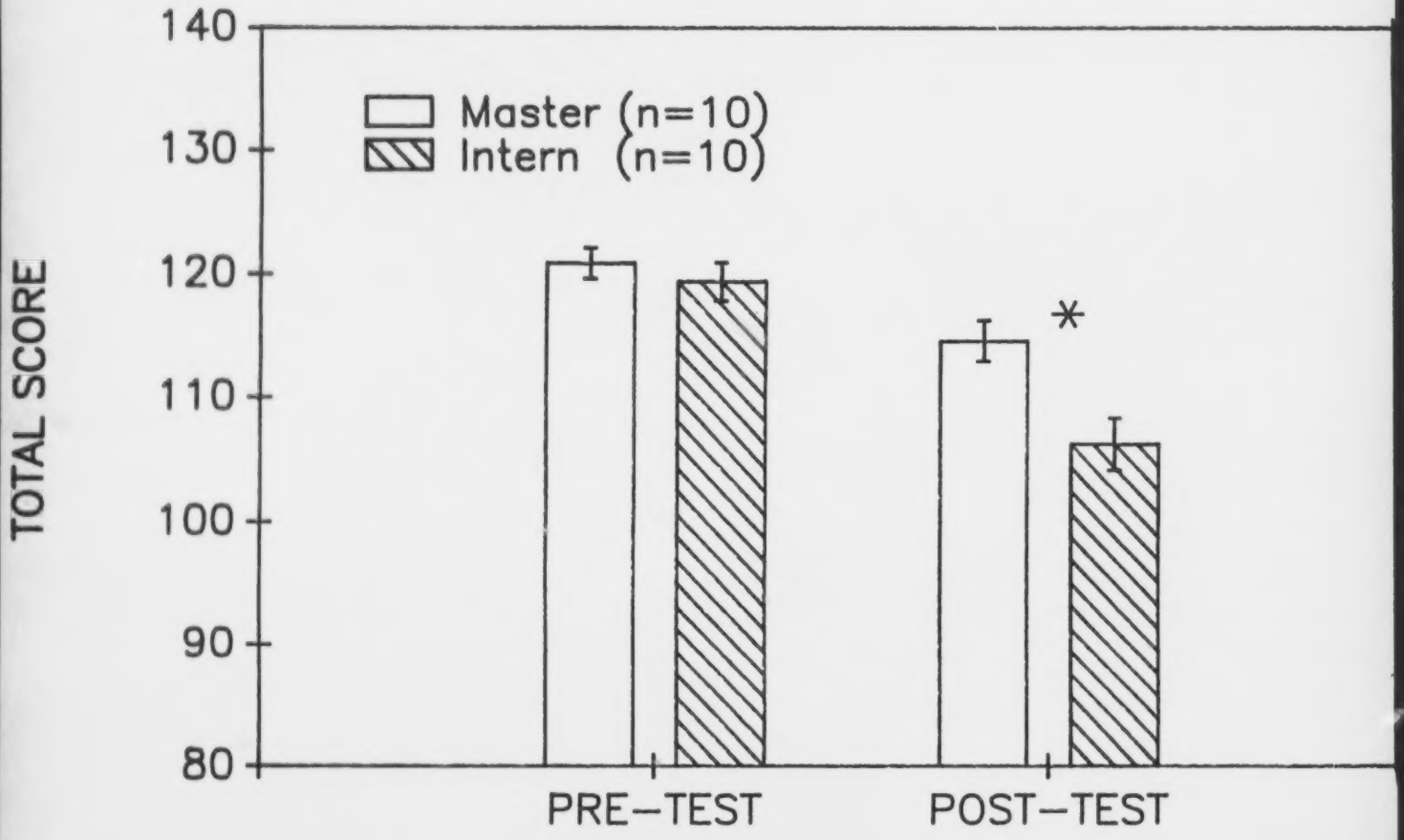

140
130
120
110
100
90
80
TOTAL SCORE
Master (n=10)
Intern (n=10)
*
PRE–TEST
POST–TEST

Figure 2

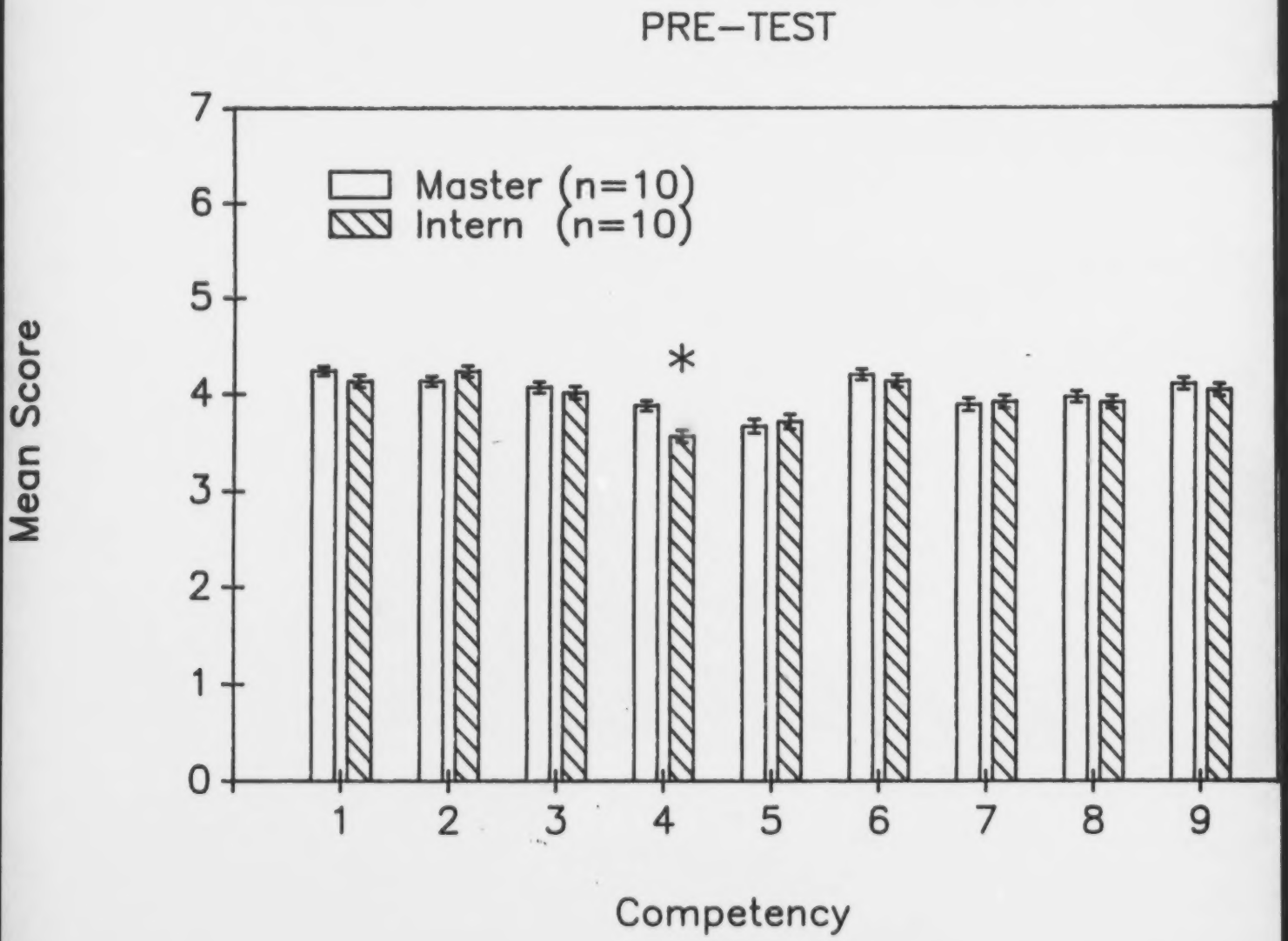
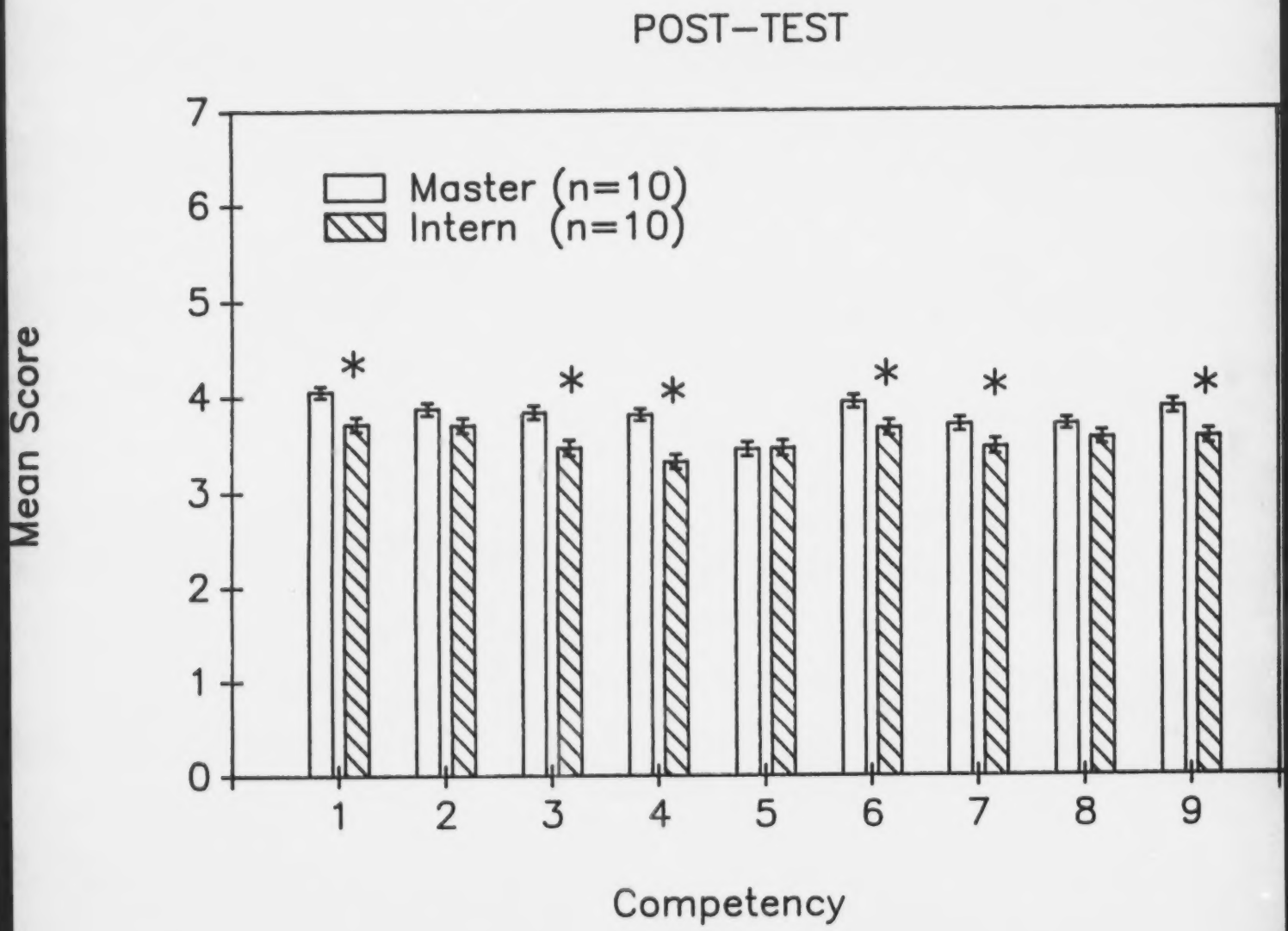

PRE–TEST
Master (n=10)
Intern (n=10)
Mean Score
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
*
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
Competency

Figure 3


POST–TEST
Master (n=10)
Intern (n=10)
Mean Score
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
Competency

* Classification of Student Perceptions Instrument Items by TPAI Competencies

TPAI Competency		Student Perceptions Instrument Item Number
CP	Uses instructional techniques, methods, and media related to the objectives.	SP 11, 12, 13
	Communicates with learners.	SP 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
	Demonstrates a repertoire of teaching methods.	SP 19, 20, 21
	Reinforces and encourages learner involvement in instruction.	SP 22, 23, 24, 25
	Demonstrates an understanding of the school subject being taught.	SP 26, 27
	Organizes time, space, materials and equipment for instruction.	SP 28, 29, 30
IS	Demonstrates enthusiasm for teaching and learning and the subject being taught.	SP 1, 2, 3
	Helps learners develop positive self-concepts.	SP 4, 5, 6
	Manages classroom interactions.	SP 7, 8, 9, 10

* Capie, W., Johnson C., Anderson, S., Ellett, C., Okey, J. Teacher performance assessment instruments. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 1979. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 183518).

Appendix B

* Student Perceptions Instrument Items

1. My teacher enjoys teaching.
2. My teacher keeps me interested in my school work.
3. My teacher knows what to do and how we are going to do it.
4. My teacher is friendly.
5. My teacher cares about my feelings.
6. My teacher is patient and understands me.
7. My teacher lets me know if I am behaving right or wrong.
8. My teacher is polite and nice.
9. My teacher does things that keep children well-behaved.
10. My teacher is fair when children misbehave.
11. My teacher teaches in ways that help me learn.
12. My teacher uses things like charts, movies, filmstrips, and records.
13. My teacher chooses books, workbooks, worksheets, and other things that help me learn.
14. My teacher gives clear explanations and directions about my class work.
15. My teacher explains things again if I don't understand.
16. My teacher listens to me and uses my ideas.
17. My teacher tells me when my answers are right or wrong.
18. My teacher talks and writes so that I can understand.
19. My teacher teaches things in an order that makes sense.
20. My teacher uses more than one way to teach.
21. My teacher works with large groups, small groups, and individual children.
22. My teacher gets me interested in new lessons.
23. My teacher gives me a chance to do things in this class.

* Capie, E., Johnson C., Anderson, S., Ellett, C ., Okey, J. Teacher performance assessment instruments. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 1979. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 183 518).

24. I work or pay attention during a whole lesson.

25. My teacher does things to keep me working or paying attention during a lesson.

26. My teacher tells me why the things we learn in school are important.

27. My teacher knows a lot about what is taught in school.

28. My teacher does things like checking the roll and handing out papers quickly.

29. My teacher is ready to begin a new activity as soon as we finish one.

30. My teacher makes my classroom look like a nice place to be.

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